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The Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey

Conducted in cooperation with
Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.®

May 1988

By
The Roper Organization Inc.

General Foods Corporation has donated the questionnaire and the complete data set to The Roper Center, a non-profit repository of survey research data located a the University of Connecticut, Storrs, Connecticut 06268. (The Roper Center is an entirely separate entity from the Roper Organization Inc.) Researchers, journalists, policy makers and other interested individuals who wish to conduct additional analyses of the data may write or call The Roper Center at (203) 486-4440.

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Introduction

This report presents the results of a national survey among parents of children between the ages of 3 and 14 on the subject of their children's reading development. The survey was commissioned by Jell-O®Desserts in cooperation with Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.®and was conducted by The Roper Organization.

The reading skills of our nation's children have come under increasing scrutiny in the past few decades. The question, "Why can't Johnny Read?" has become a familiar battle cry. The news media, politicians, educators, and the nation's parents eagerly await the results each year of the standardized reading tests, which serve as a barometer of how well our schools are addressing the problem. And more recently, national task forces have been convened and reports have been written outlining various blueprints we can follow to create "a nation of readers."

The *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* comes at a time when public concern about our young people's reading skills is high and rising. But unlike most other investigations of this issue—whether by blue chip commissions, or educators, or politicians, or the press—this unique study talks to parents.

Without diminishing the importance of our schools or the government in addressing the problem of literacy, this study focuses solely on one institution: the family. With an increasing recognition of the importance of early childhood development, the role of the family is seen by experts as more crucial than ever before—both in the development of reading skills and habits *and* in transmitting a sense of values which place a high priority on reading. According to the 1984 report of the Commission on Reading, *Becoming a Nation of Readers*, "Parents play roles of inestimable inportance in laying the foundation for learning to read."

The study talks to parents themselves, exploring their attitudes, opinions, and values with respect to reading.

How much importance do parents place on their children's reading habits and skills? Is video thought to have diminished the need for good reading skills?

Are parents satisfied with the way their children read? Do children's reading habits measure up to the standards of importance which parents set for reading?

What factors distinguish a child who is an avid reader from one who is not as interested in reading? What activities and methods are parents using to help encourage their children to read and what types of programs do they want or need to help in this area?

How willing are parents to take responsibility for developing their child's interest in reading—and even reading skills?

These are some of the questions addressed in this study.

This report begins by presenting the Survey Highlights, which summarize the most important findings. The body of the report then presents the in-depth results and commentary, with supporting charts and tables. Technical details and a description of the methodology appear in the Appendix. Exact question wording and context can be seen in the questionnaire, which also appears at the back of the report.

The study is based on telephone interviews conducted in February 1988 with a nationally representative cross-section of 1000 parents with children between the ages of 3 and 14, an age group which includes over 41 million youngsters.

Survey Highlights

The Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey

Conducted in cooperation with
Reading Is Fundamental, Inc.®

THE FIRST "R"

One of the most significant findings of the *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* is the high degree of importance that American parents place on reading. In considering their children's future, more than 9 in 10 parents (91%) say reading well is *very* important to success. Substantially fewer cite the child's friends, school, grades, neighborhood, socioeconomic status, or religious training.

In fact, only one other variable is thought to be more important to a child's future than how well the child reads—and that is the time children spend with parents themselves (cited by 94%).

Parents consider reading to be by far the most important element in a child's education.

Parents also consider reading to be by far the *most* important element in a child's formal education (with a virtually unanimous 97% of parents calling it "very important")—significantly ahead of the other two "Rs," arithmetic (89%) and writing (78%), as well as other school subjects such as science (61%), social studies (51%), history (48%), music or art (33%), or foreign languages (22%).

Underscoring these findings, parents do *not* think that the importance of reading has declined in the electronic era. They do not accept the notion that sufficient information and learning experiences can be gleaned from video. Quite to the contrary, parents are even more likely to stress the need for well-developed reading skills and habits in the face of the video onslaught. Nearly two in three parents (63%) believe that reading is becoming more important in the "Video Age," not less so.

Parental standards are clearly quite high. America's parents consider the ability to read well to be of utmost importance to their children's future. As a value, reading ranks at the very top of parental priorities.

But, based on parental assessments of their children's reading habits—particularly given parental ideals—the *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* finds that children's current "reading reality" is in need of improvement. For example:

Just 51% of parents report their children are very interested in reading.

- A bare 51% majority of children are "very interested" in reading outside of school according to parents. An additional one-third of parents (33%) say their children are "somewhat interested" in reading, while 13% say their children are not very or not at all interested. This latter figure translates into more than 5 million children who have little or no interest in reading, according to their parents.

- Only 44% of parents whose children are old enough to read say their child reads for pleasure every day. A similar percentage (43%) say their child reads for pleasure a few times a week. Among the rest, 8% say their child reads several times a month and 6% say their child reads only on a monthly basis or less often.

How satisfied are parents with the way their children read?

A two-thirds majority of parents whose children are old enough to read say they are very satisfied with the way their child

reads, while 28% are somewhat satisfied. Few parents (6%) are either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the way their children read.

In most surveys, a two-thirds strong satisfaction rating might be considered quite impressive. In this instance, however, there is a large 25 to 30 percentage point gap between the 91% who think reading well is very important to their child's future or the 97% who believe it is very important in the child's education, and the 66% who say they are very satisfied with the way their children read this suggests that parents are less than fully satisfied.

The connection between reading a lot and reading well needs to be reinforced among today's parents.

The survey finds that another gap—this time in parents' own standards—exists as well. This gap lies between the perceived importance of knowing how to *read well* (which, as we have seen, is extremely high) and the perceived importance of reading *frequently*, which is less pronounced. Although a large 72% majority of parents believe *how much* a child reads is critical to future success, this still falls far below the 91% who think *how well* a child reads is crucial.

Parents clearly make a distinction between the importance of their children having strong reading *skills* (i.e., reading well) and the importance of their children having strong reading *habits* (i.e., reading frequently). A number of recent studies, however, have concluded that there is a link between the two. "Skilled reading is a lifelong pursuit," says *Becoming a Nation of Readers*. "Becoming a skilled reader is a matter of continuous practice, development and refinement." The *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* suggests that this is a point which may need reinforcing with America's parents.

READING BEGINS AT HOME

Where does the responsibility lie for a child's interest in reading and his or her reading ability? Is it primarily with the parents or primarily with the schools?

Nearly three-quarters of America's parents (72%) say that it is primarily *their* responsibility to make sure that their children develop an interest in reading. Hardly any lay the primary responsibility at the doorsteps of the schools (3%), while slightly less than a quarter (22%) volunteer that sparking children's interest in reading is a mutual responsibility of family and school.

Parents say it is their responsibility -- much more than the schools -- to ensure their children read well.

Similarly, a 58% majority of parents say they are also responsible for how *well* their children read. Schools are seen as playing a somewhat more significant role in developing reading abilities than in reading interest, with 9% saying that developing reading abilities is the school's responsibility and 32% volunteering it is a joint responsibility of parents and the schools. Still, however, parents consider themselves primarily responsible.

A child's first foray into the world of reading is also primarily the result of parents' encouragement. Asked who or what was most important in encouraging their child to begin reading, fully two-thirds of parents volunteer that they themselves were the most important influence. More specifically, 47% say it was the mother, 14% say the father, and 16% just said parents.

In comparison, only 15% mention school or teachers as the instrumental force, and only one in ten point to their children's own motivation or another family member.

PORTRAIT OF THE AVID READER

Age, sex and parents' education are all highly correlated with strong interest in reading.

As with most challenges confronting our society, it is crucial to keep the scope of today's reading problem in perspective. Not all parents are worried about the way their children read. To the contrary, as reported earlier, a 66% majority express satisfaction with their progenies' reading habits and skills. A 51% majority say their children *are* very interested in reading. And 44% say their children *do* read every day for pleasure.

And in seeking solutions to social problems, a good starting point can often be to analyze what went *right*—why the problem was avoided in a specific set of circumstances—rather than solely concentrating on what has gone wrong. The lessons of success can lead to remedies for failure.

What kind of child could be termed an avid reader? Which factors might explain this child's heightened interest in and practice of reading?

The Demography of the Avid Reader

Interest in reading drops dramatically following the 5th grade.

Beginning strictly from a demographic point of view, the avid reader tends to be a young child, is more likely to be a girl than a boy, and has well-educated parents. These are the three demographic characteristics—age, sex, and parents' education—which have the most direct correlation with strong interest in reading.

Age: According to parents, children's interest in reading and their reading habits are strongly influenced by the child's age. A majority of parents with children in pre-school (56%), Kindergarten through 2nd grade (59%), and 3rd through 5th grades (53%) all report that their child is "very interested" in reading. After 5th grade, however, interest in reading drops dramatically to only 39%.

A drop off in reading for pleasure occurs at even an earlier age. A 57% majority of parents with pre-school children and 59% of parents with children in Kindergarten through 2nd grade report that their children read for pleasure every day. Among children in 3rd to 5th grades, however, only 39% read for pleasure every day, and only 33% of children in 6th grade or more read daily.

Sex: According to parents, girls' interest in reading is nearly half again as strong as boys'. A 61% majority of parents say their girls are very interested in reading, compared with only 43% of boys. The difference is slightly less pronounced, though still significant, with regard to reading habits. Fifty percent of parents say their girls read for pleasure every day, compared with 38% of boys.

Parents with the least education express the greatest interest in programs to help them help their children read better.

Parents' Education: A final factor that correlates with whether or not children are avid readers has nothing directly to do with children at all. Instead, it concerns parents' educational backgrounds.

Parents' educational background is a factor which carries throughout many aspects of the *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey*. It correlates directly with how much children read, and also with other facts such as parents' own reading habits, how much parents read with their children, parents' satisfaction with their children's reading abilities, and their willingness to accept responsibility for the development of their children's reading skills.

But, as we will see later in this report, the high *value* placed on reading cuts across parents of all educational backgrounds, (It cuts across all other demographic subgroups, as well.) And, in fact, parents who are the least educated express the greatest amount of interest in various types of programs which can help them to help their children read better.

interested in either. According to parents, at least, reading and television are not necessarily in conflict. A child's interest in one does not preclude the other.

Nevertheless, when the extremes are examined in greater detail—children who are very interested in reading but not in television versus children who are very interested in television but not in reading—the influence of parents in helping to motivate children to read can be seen clearly:

Reading daily with children, setting aside special reading time and limiting TV all help create interested readers.

- Parents of children with a high interest in reading and a low interest in TV are nearly twice as likely to read daily with their children as parents of children with a low interest in reading and a high interest in TV (69% vs. 37%).

- They are also more likely to set aside time each day for their children to read (69% vs. 48%) and are more likely to limit the amount of TV their children can watch (82% vs. 61%).

The importance of the child's sex is also clearly evident. As already mentioned, girls more than boys are likely to be avid readers. When looking at the extremes of the spectrum, the gender of the child becomes even more important.

It is interesting to note, however, that the differences between the two groups are *not* the result of differences in parental attitudes toward reading. About 9 in 10 parents of each group say how well a child reads is very important to his or her future, and

about 7 in 10 parents of each group say how much a child reads is also very important.

Parents can motivate children to read by providing a conducive home environment.

To reiterate the earlier point, reading and television are not necessarily at odds with each other. There are large numbers of children who are interested in both, and large numbers who are not interested in either. But for children at the extremes, the study finds a significant difference in parental *behavior* which helps provide clues as to those factors which are most critical in developing children's reading habits and skills.

DEVELOPING THE LITERATE SOCIETY: THE ROLE PARENTS CAN PLAY

We have seen thus far that America's parents believe in the ideal of a literate society. The fact that this belief is so unanimous and uniform—shared by men and women, rich and poor, black and white, college graduates and high school drop-outs—attests to the compelling importance of reading in American society.

But as parents themselves admit, there is a gap between their own standards and their children's performance. What role can parents play in closing this gap? What is to be done?

One initial role that the *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* suggests parents can play is in *motivating* their children to read, whether through reading with children or through providing a home environment conducive to the development of good reading habits.

Slightly more than half of the parents interviewed (51%) report reading with their children every day. Parents are most likely to read with their children every day when they are either in pre-school (62%) or in Kindergarten through 2nd grade (75%). After 2nd grade, daily reading with children drops sharply, to 47% for children in 3rd through 5th grades and 26% after 5th grade.

This drop off in daily reading with children as they get older correlates directly with the drop off in children's interest in reading which occurs with age, a finding which was discussed earlier. A 64% majority of parents whose child is—according to parents—very interested in reading, read with their child every day. Daily reading with children decreases substantially—to 41%—in households where parents say their child is somewhat interested in reading, and then decreases again (to 31%) in homes where parents say their child is not interested in reading.

Parents' own book reading habits are a significant influence on how much and how well their children read.

The study does not permit us to conclude whether there is a cause-and-effect relationship at work here, or whether it is merely a correlation between two unrelated variables. However, the correlation is clearly evident and is certainly worthy of additional investigation.

Of equal importance with parents' role in motivating their children to read is the fact the parents serve as *role models* for their children when it comes to reading. Parents' own reading habits—particularly book reading—are a significant influence on *how much* and *how well* their children read.

Almost equal percentages of parents report reading books daily (23%), weekly (29%), monthly (25%), and less often (23%). Interestingly, daily book reading cuts uniformly across all demographic subgroups.

The *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* clearly suggests that frequent book reading by parents is a strong inducement to children to read frequently. A 60% majority of parents who read books almost every day report that their child also reads for pleasure almost every day. When parents' book reading drops to a few times per week, their child's frequency of reading drops as well, with only 47% of children reading every day. And in households where parents read books less often than weekly, only 37% of children read on a daily basis.

Direct exposure to books is parents' number one method for raising readers.

When it comes to techniques which parents have used and found effective in helping their children to read, methods involving direct exposure to books and reading are mentioned most often.

The most popular method, mentioned by 45% of parents includes activities directly involving reading, such as parents reading to children or children reading to parents. Next in popularity, cited as effective by 30% of parents, is to provide their children with access to books (e.g., buying their children books, taking them to the library, and so forth).

Fewer parents point to techniques such as encouraging their children to read through motivational activities or games (19%), instructional activities (14%), or methods involving reward or punishment (3%).

Beyond the techniques which they have used in the past, American parents express interest in various programs involving themselves, the schools, and other educational experts. The *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* explores parents' receptiveness to five techniques in particular.

One basic aid is simply to provide children with easy access to books, whether through public or school libraries. An overwhelming 93% majority of parents say this would be very useful in stimulating their children to become good readers.

There is also a call for schools to provide parents with easy-to-understand evaluations of their children's reading abilities (80% say this would be very useful) and for a close relationship between parents and the teachers (79%).

A majority of parents (54%) also believe that the provision of materials such as games, activities, and special books that encourage reading and are supplied to them by schools or educational experts would help. Such educational materials are considered particularly useful for those in lower income brackets and for parents who never completed high school themselves, but the general appeal of this type of program is quite wide-spread indeed.

Finally, a strong plurality (45%) of parents think that the provision of suggested reading lists for their children, compiled by the schools or by educational experts, would be very useful to them in cultivating their children's reading habits.

Chapter One

The First "R"

Chapter Introduction

This chapter sets the context for this investigation of parents' views about their children's reading skills and habits by exploring the importance of reading from several perspectives: First, reading is looked at in the context of various other factors in terms of their impact on a child's future; second, the importance of reading is rated in comparison to other subjects which a child studies in school. Against this backdrop, parents are asked how satisfied they are with the way their children read; and finally, reading's importance is assessed in light of the fact that America is fast becoming a video-oriented society, which some might conclude makes strong reading skills less vital than in the past.

In virtually all respects throughout this survey, parents clearly recognize how important it is for children to be able to read well. Especially important is the fact that parents made this assessment early in the interview, when reading was discussed in the context of other family activities, extracurricular interests and school subjects, and before there was any direct focus on the matter of reading per se. Parents were intentionally kept unaware of the study's focus on reading until about half way through the interview, so that attitudes toward reading could be measured in the context of other aspects of children's lives.

However, this chapter also reveals several important gaps in parents' attitudes and opinions. One is a distinction which parents make between the importance of strong reading skills *(i.e., knowing how to read well) and the importance of strong reading* habits *(i.e., reading frequently). The second gap is between the high level of importance placed on strong reading skills and a dramatically lower sense of satisfaction with the way their children read.*

The Importance Of Reading For A Child's Future

To provide a context for understanding the value they attach to reading, parents were asked to assess the importance of nine different factors that can affect a child's future.

All of the factors asked about were, admittedly, ones that can have a significant impact on children in later years, and parents do not consider any of them to be unimportant. Clear differences do emerge, however, in terms of which factors parents feel are "very important" for a child's future and which are less so.

Far and away, the two factors which parents feel are most important for a child's future are the amount of time parents spend with a child (named as very important by 94%) and how well a child reads (named as very important by 91%). This high regard for the importance of strong reading skills cuts across all demographic subgroups within the population, including blacks and whites, rich and poor, well educated and less well educated.

Seen as being somewhat less important to a child's future are the friends the child has (rated very important to a child's future by 77% of parents), religious training (72%), and *how much* a child reads (72%).

Subgroups which are the most likely to feel that the amount a child reads is very important to the child's future include:

- Mothers more than fathers (74% vs. 67%)
- Black parents more than white parents (88% vs. 69%)
- Parents with less than a high school education (83%).

The school a child goes to was ranked sixth in importance (69% rated it as very important), followed by the grades a child receives (66%), and the neighborhood the child lives in (65%).

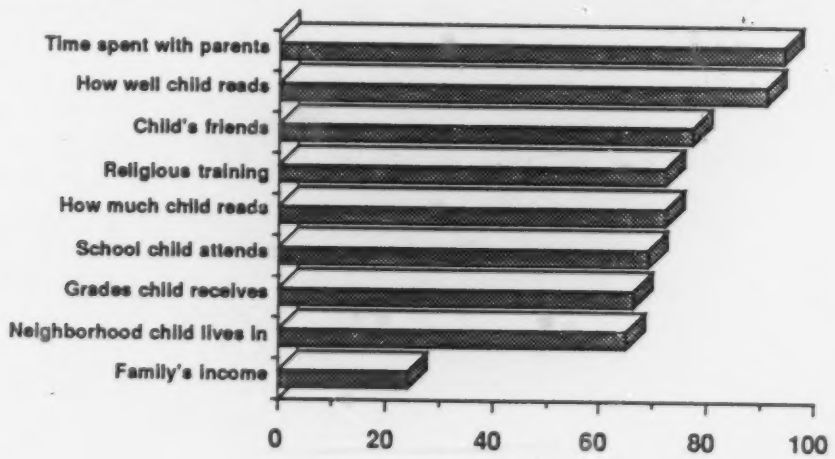
The least amount of importance is accorded to the family's income, with only 24% of parents saying income is very important to a child's future.

The 19 point difference between the percentage of parents who say *how well* a child reads is very important to the child's future (91%) and the percentage who say the same about *how much* a child read (72%) suggests that many parents make a distinction between the *skill* of reading (how well a child reads) and the *habit* of reading (how much a child reads); clearly, the skill is seen as more universally important to parents than the habit.

However, later in this report (The Profile of the Avid Reader, Chapter 3), we see that there is a direct correlation between a parent's views on how much a child reads and their child's level of interest in reading. The more likely parents are to feel that the habit of reading (as well as the skill) is very important to a child's future, the more likely they are to report a high level of interest in reading by their own child. By their own testimony, strong reading habits are perhaps more important than many parents recognize.

Question 3

Factors Rated "Very Important" For A Child's Future



The Importance Of Reading In A Child's Education

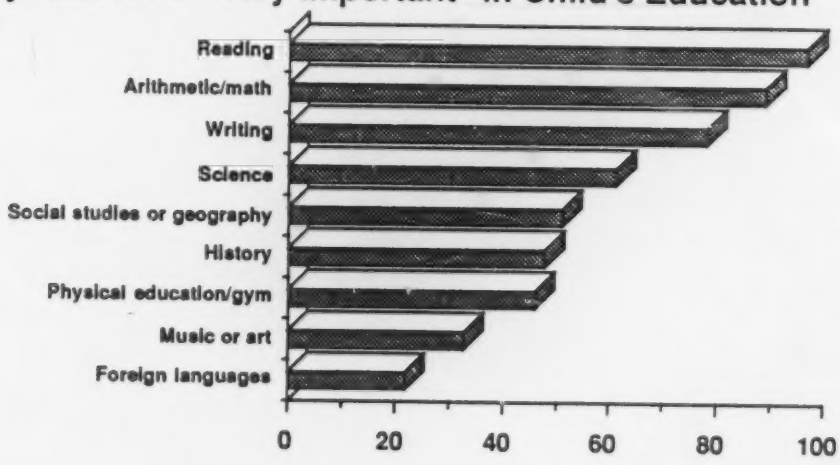
Underscoring their perceptions about the importance of reading to a child's future, parents rank it first among the various subjects which a child learns in school. In fact, when parents are asked to rate nine school subjects in terms of their importance in a child's education, reading is far and away the leader with virtually all parents (97%) calling it "very important."

The second and third of the three "R's," arithmetic and writing follow, with 89% and 78% of parents, respectively, giving them a "very important" rating.

A smaller majority of parents rate science (61%) or social studies/geography (51%) as very important, and fewer than half name history (48%), or physical education or gym (46%). The two subjects that parents are least likely to name as very important are music or art (33%) and foreign languages (22%).

Question 4

Subjects Rated "Very Important" in Child's Education



Parents' Satisfaction With Children's Reading

How satisfied are parents with the way their children read?

A two-thirds majority of parents whose children are old enough to read say they are *very* satisfied with the way their child reads, while 28% say they are *somewhat* satisfied. Only 6% say they are either somewhat or very dissatisfied with the way their children read.

In most surveys, a 66% strong satisfaction rating might be considered quite impressive. In this instance, however, there is a 25 percentage point gap between the importance which parents place on reading (91%) and their level of satisfaction with their child's reading skills. Parents' level of satisfaction falls short of the standards of importance which they themselves have set.

There are differences in the level of satisfaction with the way their children read among the following subgroups:

- Parents are far more satisfied with the way their daughters read than the way their sons read (73% vs. 60%).

- Satisfaction is higher among parents who have graduated from college (73%), than among those who are high school graduates or have not completed high school (62% each). Parents with some college education stand in-between at 67%.

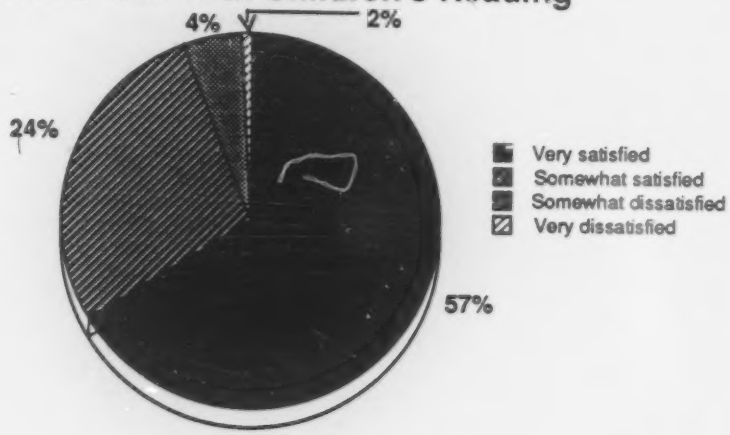
- Satisfaction also varies by annual household income, with only 54% of those in the $15,000 or less income bracket expressing complete satisfaction, compared with 68% of parents in the $15,000 to $35,000 bracket and 70% of those earning $35,000 or more.

- Parents of children in private or religious-run schools are more satisfied with the way their children read than those whose children attend public schools (80% vs. 63%).

Interestingly, however, there are virtually no differences in satisfaction with their children's reading found by child's year in school, single-parent versus two-parent households, or households where the mother works and those where she does not.

Question 11

Parents' Satisfaction With Children's Reading



Based on parents of children who are old enough to read: 87% of total sample

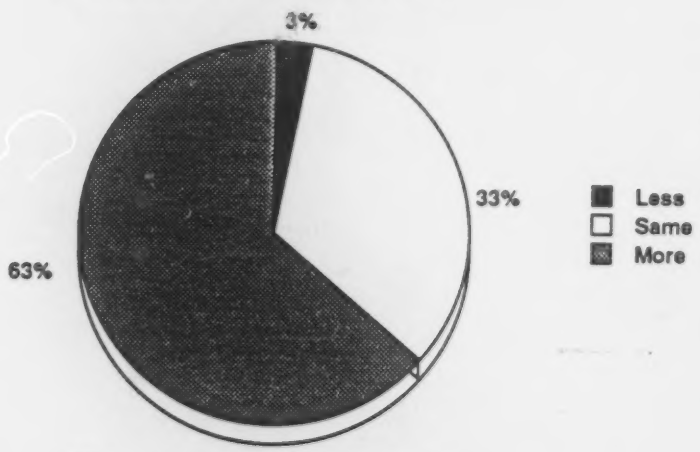
The Importance Of Reading In A Video Society

It is an undeniable fact that we live in a highly video-oriented society. Today's young families are the first in history where both the children and the parents have grown up under the pervasive influence of television. Television has become the dominant source of news and information. The average daily dose of television continues to increase steadily for both adults and youngsters. Cable television is increasing the number of information and entertainment outlets which are available to most Americans, including special channels targeted at children. And the rapid growth in the number of VCR households promises to bring even more changes in both the quantity and the quality of information and entertainment which Americans can receive via video.

In light of this, parents were asked explicitly whether they think that in today's video society reading skills are more or less important than in the past. Underscoring their earlier assessment of the importance of reading for their children, nearly two-thirds said reading skills are even *more* important today, and one-third said they have the same importance as in the past. Only 3% called reading skills less important in our video-oriented society. This perspective cuts evenly across all demographic subgroups.

Question 14

Importance Of Reading In Today's Video Society, Compared With The Past



*Does not total 100% due to rounding.

Chapter Two

Reading Begins At Home

Chapter Introduction

Where does the responsibility lie for a child's interest in reading and his or her reading ability? Is it primarily with the parents or primarily with the schools? These are questions which are frequently raised and, therefore, parents' views on the subject were explored in this study.

As this chapter shows, parents overwhelmingly feel it is primarily their responsibility--not the schools'--to develop their children's reading skills and habits. Beyond the question of responsibility, this chapter also examines who or what parents feel actually did influence their children to begin reading.

The Responsibility For Children's Reading

In light of the broad based regard for reading expressed by parents in Chapter 1, it is important to find that a clear majority of parents see *themselves* as being the key in ensuring both the development of their children's reading skills and the development of, or interest in, reading among their children. However, a sizeable minority see the task as a joint responsibility of parents and schools.

A large 72% majority of parents feel it is primarily their responsibility--not the schools'--to make sure that a child develops an *interest* in reading. One in five (22%) see this as a joint responsibility of parents and schools. Very few see this as the primary responsibility of either the schools alone (3%) or the child (3%).

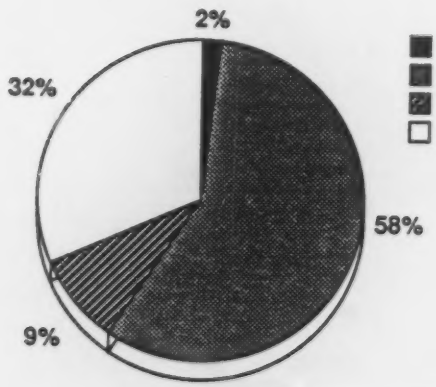
Even when it comes to making sure that a child reads well, 6 in 10 parents (58%) say it is primarily their responsibility. One-third (32%) see this as a joint responsibility of parents and schools. Here, too, however, few see it as the primary responsibility of the schools (9%) or the child (2%).

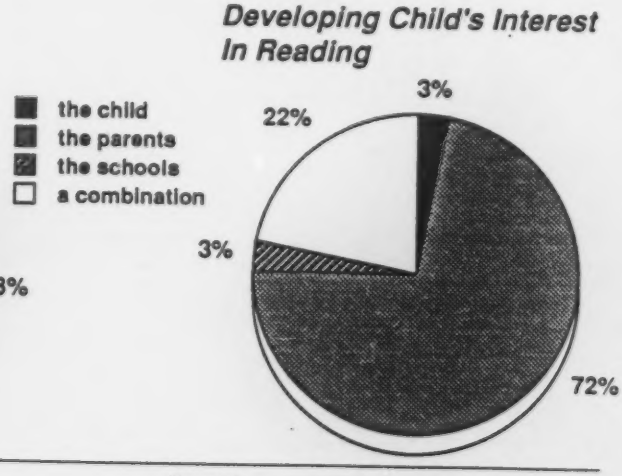
Clearly, parents say they are willing to take responsibility for the success—and presumably the failure—in our attempt to create a nation of readers in America.

Questions 9, 10

Responsibility For Child's Reading Development

Children Reading Well





Developing Child's Interest In Reading

Encouraging Children To Begin Reading

Clearly linked to parents' belief that they are primarily responsible for developing their children's reading habits, is the fact that they feel they themselves were primarily responsible for encouraging their child to begin reading.

Asked who or what they think was most important in encouraging their child to *begin* reading, fully two-thirds of parents volunteer that they were the most important influence. More specifically, 47% say it was the mother, 14% say the father, and 16% just said parents. Another 8% say that reading to the child was the major source of encouragement, although it is unclear whether this means parents' reading or others.

Additionally, 15% of parents indicate that schools or teachers were the most important influence, suggesting perhaps that a substantial number of children are not being encouraged to read until they enter school. Another 10% say it was a family member other than the parents, and 10% also say it was the child's own motivation. Interestingly, only 1% say that it was educational programs on television that were the most important factor in leading their children to begin reading.

It is interesting to note that while mothers and fathers agree in their view that it was the parents who were primarily responsible for encouraging their children to begin reading, they disagree somewhat in their perceptions about which parent in particular played this role. Among mothers, 50% say that they themselves were the most important influence, while 12% say the father and 13% just say parents. Among fathers, however, only 39% single-out mothers specifically, while 17% say fathers and close to a quarter (23%) just say parents.

The other major subgroup difference in this question is found with respect to the parent's education level. Parents who either completed college or attended college are the most likely to say that the child's parents were most responsible for encouraging their child to begin reading (75% and 73% respectively). This figure drops to 62% among parents who stopped going to school after their high school graduation, and 57% among those who did

not finish high school. Among this least educated group of parents, fully 1 in 5 (19%) say that another family member—presumably one who reads better or more confidently than the parents—encouraged their child to begin reading.

Question 8

Who Or What Encourages Children To Begin Reading?

	%
Parents (net)	68
Mother	47
Parents (unspecified)	16
Father	14
School/teachers	15
Other family member	10
Child's own motivation	10
Reading to child (unspecified)	8
Other	9
Don't know	3

Chapter Three

Portrait Of The Avid Reader

Chapter Introduction

Against the backdrop of parents' overwhelmingly strong belief in the importance of reading, this chapter discusses their perceptions about their children's interest in reading: Where does reading rate in comparison with other extracurricular activities? How often do children read for pleasure? How satisfied are parents with the way their children read?

These questions permit us then to present a profile of the avid reader, looking at the various factors which might help to explain why some children have a more heightened interest in reading than others. And as part of this profile, the Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey *investigates the relationship between a child's interest in reading and his or her other interests—looking in particular at the relationship between reading and TV.*

Children's Interests Outside Of School

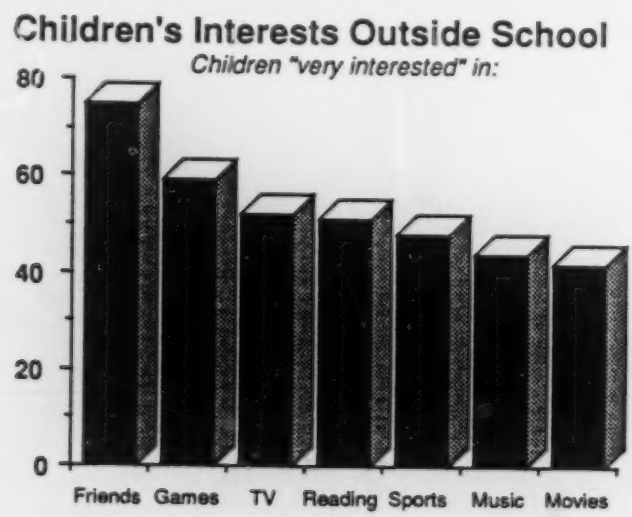
In assessing the interests their children have outside of school, parents report that reading falls neither at the top of the list nor at the bottom. Reading ranks fourth in a list of seven activities parents say their children are "very interested" in.

Spending time with friends stands clearly at the top of the list (73%), followed at some distance by games and hobbies (59%).

Television barely edges out reading, according to parents. A 52% majority say their children are "very interested" in television, while a nearly identical 51% say their children are "very interested" in reading. An additional one-third of parents (33%) say their children are "somewhat interested" in reading, while 13% say their children are not very or not at all interested. This latter figure translates into more than 5 million children who have little or no interest in reading, according to their parents.

The fact that a bare 51% majority of parents say their children are "very interested" in reading underscores the gap, discussed earlier, between the high degree of importance which parents place on reading and their own reports about the role reading plays in their children's lives.

Question 1



How Often Children Read For Pleasure

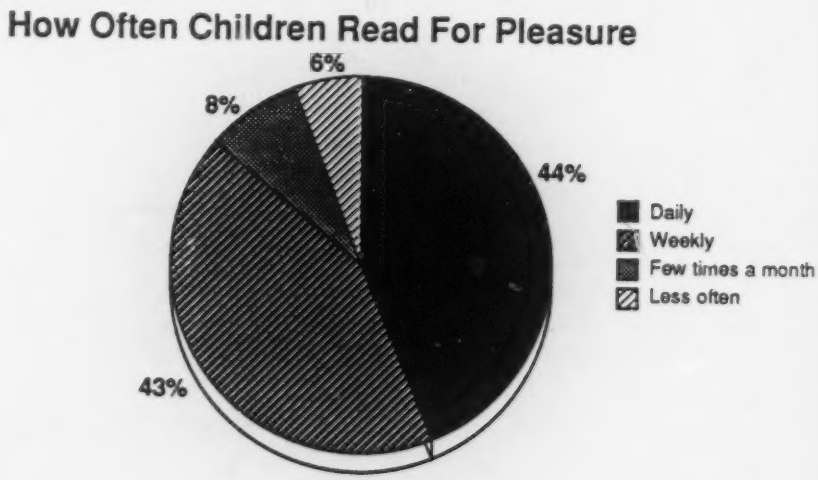
The gap between parents' very high standards regarding the importance of reading and their perceptions about their children's performance is even more pronounced with respect to children's reading habits.

Only 44% of parents whose children are old enough to read say their child reads for pleasure every day. A similar percentage (43%) say their child reads for pleasure a few times a week. Among the rest, 8% say their child reads several times a month and 6% say their child reads only a few times a month or less often.

In other words, there are about 1.7 million children between the ages of 3 and 14 who are old enough to read but who read for pleasure only a few times a month or less.

Reading for pleasure among children not yet old enough to read (comprising 13% of the children asked about) is defined as parents reading to children, and this is at a higher level. A 61% majority of parents of children who are too young to read say they read to their child every day, and an additional 32% read to their children a few times per week. Only 6% of parents with children in this category say they read to them less.

Question 6



The Demography Of The Avid Reader

What kind of child could be termed an avid reader? Which factors might explain this child's heightened interest in, or practice of, reading?

From a demographic point-of-view, three characteristics have the strongest correlations: age, sex, and parents' education.

Age: According to parents, children's interest in reading and their reading habits are strongly influenced by the child's age. A majority of parents with children in pre-school (56%), Kindergarten through 2nd grade (59%), and 3rd through 5th grades (53%) all report that their child is "very interested" in reading. After 5th grade, however, strong interest in reading drops dramatically to only 39%.

A drop off in reading for pleasure occurs at even an earlier age. A 57% majority of parents with pre-school children and 54% of parents with children in Kindergarten through 2nd grade report that their children read for pleasure every day. Among children in 3rd to 5th grades, however, only 39% read for pleasure every day; after 5th grade only 33% of children read daily.

This decline in interest in reading among older children may be due to a number of factors. For example, older children may have less time to devote to reading *for pleasure* as they devote more time to reading *for school*; that is as they spend more time with required reading for school rather than reading what they *want* to read, they may begin to derive less pleasure from reading.

Also, it is undeniable that the range of outside interests available to older children is far wider than it is for younger children. Perhaps, then, the drop-off in interest in reading is merely a reflection of more competition for the attention—and interest—of older children.

But there is a third possibility as well. Maybe the decline in interest in reading is a reflection of the earlier finding, that parents value the *skill* of reading more highly than they value the *habit* of reading. Perhaps reading acitivity drops off because parents become complacent when they feel that their children know how to read and do not place sufficient emphasis on their continued growth as readers.

Questions 1, 6

Demographic Profile Of The Avid Reader

	Child very interested in reading	*Child reads for pleasure every day*
Total sample	51%	44%
Sex of child		
Male	43	38
Female	61	50
Child's year in school		
Pre-school	56	57
Kindergarten - 2nd grade	59	54
3rd grade - 5th grade	53	39
6th grade or higher	39	33
Annual household income		
Less than $15,000	50	44
$15,000 to $34,999	53	40
$35,000 and over	49	47
Parents' education		
High school graduate or less	45	37
Some college	54	46
College graduate or more	62	53
Mothers (net)	53	42
Describing daughters	62	47
Describing sons	45	37
Fathers (net)	46	49
Describing daughters	57	61
Describing sons	39	40

Sex: Another factor which correlates strongly with interest in reading and reading habits is the child's sex.

According to parents, girls' interest in reading is nearly half again as strong as boys'. A 61% majority of parents say their girls are very interested in reading, compared with only 43% of boys. The difference is slightly less pronounced, though still significant, with regard to reading habits. Fifty percent of parents say their girls read for pleasure every day, compared with 38% of boys.

It is interesting to note that perceptions here are colored somewhat by the sex of the parent. For example, mothers -- by a margin of 53% to 46% -- are somewhat more likely than fathers to say that their child is very interested in reading; however, fathers are somewhat more likely than mothers (49% to 42%) to say that their child reads for pleasure every day.

And when it comes to reading behavior—particularly with respect to their daughters—mothers and fathers again disagree. A 61% majority of fathers say their daughters read for pleasure every day; only 47% of mothers share this assessment. (There is no real difference in perception, however, with respect to their sons, with 40% of fathers and 37% of mothers saying their sons read for pleasure on a daily basis.)

Parents' Education: A final factor that helps children become avid readers has nothing directly to do with children at all. Instead, it concerns parents' educational backgrounds. A 53% majority of parents with a college degree or more report that their children read every day. This drops to 46% for parents with some college, 38% for parents with a high school diploma, and 35% for parents with less than a high school degree.

Parents' educational background is a factor which carries throughout the survey. It correlates not only with how much children read but also with parents' own reading habits, how much parents read with their children, parents' satisfaction with their children's reading abilities, and their willingness to accept responsibility for the development of children's reading skills.

The Avid Reader Is Well-Rounded

There is sometimes an image of the child who likes to read as being a young "bookworm," a solitary child with a limited range of other interests. The *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* clearly dispels this stereotype, finding that avid readers are well-rounded children with a diversity of interests.

For example, avid readers are just as interested in their friends as children with a lesser interest in reading, according to their parents. Seventy-two percent of avid readers are very interested in spending time with their friends, versus 75% of children with moderate or little interest in reading. Avid readers are also as interested in games or hobbies as those with less interest in reading.

Interest in music is somewhat higher among avid readers, perhaps because avid readers are more likely to be girls, and the study finds that girls are more interested in music than boys.

The two areas where the survey finds avid readers diverging from other children are with respect to television and movies. Children who parents say are "very" or "somewhat" interested in reading tend to be less interested—according to parents—in both television and movies. About half of the children who are very or somewhat interested in reading are also very interested in television. Among those whose children are not very or not at all interested in reading, however, strong interest in television jumps to nearly two-thirds. A similar pattern holds for movies.

Question 1

Correlation Between Children's Interest In Reading And Other Interests

	Interest in Reading		
	High	*Moderate*	*Low*
	%	%	%
Child is "very interested" in:			
Friends	72	75	75
Games	60	57	60
Sports	45	55	46
TV	49	51	63
Music	52	37	34
Movies	39	41	53

It would appear, then, that there is an inverse correlation between interest in visual media and interest in reading. Upon further examination, however, the survey finds that reading and television are not mutually exclusive. These findings are discussed in the next section.

The Avid Reader And Television

While the previous section found that avid readers are somewhat less interested in television and movies than other children, this does not mean that a love of reading rules out interest in the visual media. In fact, parents classify their children into four groups of almost equal size. According to parents:

26% of children are very interested in reading but *not* TV;
25% are very interested in reading *and* in TV;
21% are not very interested in *either* reading or TV; and
25% are very interested in TV but *not* in reading.

In other words, a quarter of the nation's children are at each of the extremes--interested in reading but not TV and interested in TV but not reading. But there are as many children who fall in between--highly interested in both reading and TV or not interested in either. According to the testimony of parents, at least, reading and television are not necessarily in conflict; a child's interest in one does not preclude the other.

Nevertheless, when the extremes are examined in greater detail—children who are very interested in reading but not in television versus children who are very interested in television but not in reading—some interesting findings emerge.

First, we saw earlier that girls are more likely than boys to be avid readers. When looking at the extremes of the reading-TV spectrum, the gender differences become even more pronounced. Two-thirds of the children with a high interest in reading and a low interest in TV are girls. Conversely, two-thirds of those with a high interest in TV and a low interest in reading are boys.

We also saw earlier that interest in reading declines with age, and children with a low interest in reading and high interest in TV are older than children with high interest in reading and low interest in TV (8.9 years versus 7.7 years).

Beyond demographics, it is interesting to note that the differences between the two groups are *not* the result of differences in parental attitudes toward reading. About 9 in 10 parents of each group say how well a child reads is very important to his or her future, and about 7 in 10 parents of each group say how much a child reads is also very important.

But while attitudes don't differ, parental behavior does:

- Parents of children with a high interest in reading and a low interest in TV are nearly twice as likely to read with their children every day than parents of children with a low interest in reading and a high interest in TV (69% versus 37%). Conversely, parents of children with a low interest in reading and high interest in TV are considerably more likely to watch television with their children every day than parents of children with a high interest in reading a low interest in TV (85% versus 54%).

- Similarly, parents of children with a high interest in reading and a low interest in TV are much more likely than parents of children with a low interest in reading a high interest in TV to say that their children have time set aside each day for reading (69% versus 48%) and that they limit the amount of time their children can watch TV (82% versus 61%).

Reading, TV, And Parental Behavior

	Reading interest high and TV interest low %	*Reading interest low and TV interest high* %
Parents spend time every day w/children:		
Reading	69	37
Watching TV	54	85
Children's TV viewing is limited	82	61
Time set aside for children's reading every day	69	48
Very satisfied with children's reading	86	39

The sharpest difference of all comes with respect to parents' satisfaction with their children's reading abilities. Parents of children with a high interest in reading and a low interest in TV are more than twice as likely to be fully satisfied with the way their children read than parents of children who are very interested in television but not reading: 86% versus 39%.

To reiterate the earlier point, reading and television are not necessarily in conflict. There are large numbers of children who are interested in both, and large numbers who are not interested in either. But for children at the extremes, the study finds a significant difference in parental behavior, which helps provide clues as to those factors that are most critical in developing children's reading habits and skills.

Chapter Four

Developing The Literate Society: The Role Parents Can Play

Chapter Introduction

This chapter paints a portrait of activities and methods which parents can use to encourage their children to read. Some of these are activities which parents profess are already part of their home life; others are programs which parents say would be potentially helpful.

This chapter identifies concrete, practical ways which the findings of the Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey *suggest might help to close the gap between parental expectations and values with respect to reading and their children's actual reading experiences and performance.*

How Often Parents Read With Their Children

Parents report that reading ranks third—far behind television, but close to homework—as an activity which they spend time doing with their children every day.

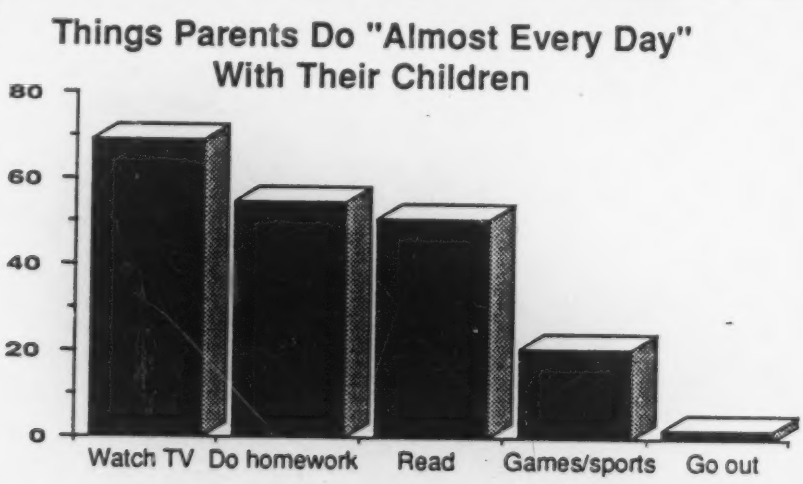
Nearly 7 in 10 parents (69%) say they watch television with their children almost every day, and an additional 24% watch TV together a couple of times a week. This makes television by far the most frequent activity (out of a list of five) which parents and children do together.

A 55% majority of parents report helping their children with homework almost every day, making it the second most frequent daily activity. An additional 18% say they help their children with homework a couple of times a week.

About half the sample of parents (51%) report reading with their children every day, with an additional one-quarter of parents saying they read together with their children a few times per week.

Playing games or sports together is a distant fourth as a daily activity (21%), while going out (to movies, sporting events, music events) finishes at the bottom of the list, with most parents saying they do this together with their children several times a month (47%) or less often (30%), but not daily or weekly.

Question 2



Family television viewing habits are fairly uniform across demographic subgroups. However, there are some important variations in how often parents read with their children.

The largest difference relates to the age of the child in question. Parents are most likely to read with their children every day when their children are either in pre-school (62%) or in Kindergarten through 2nd grade (75%). Daily reading with children then drops sharply as their children get older. Only 47% of parents with children in 3rd through 5th grades say they read together every day, and this figure drops even further (to 26%) among those whose children are in 6th grade or more.

This drop-off in daily reading with children as they get older correlates with the drop-off in children's interest in reading which occurs with age, a finding which was discussed in Chapter 3. A 64% majority of parents whose child is—according to parents—very interested in reading, read with their child every day. Daily reading with children decreases substantially -- to 41% -- in households where parents say their child is somewhat interested in reading, and then decreases again (to 31%) in homes where parents say their child is not interested in reading.

The study does not permit us to conclude whether or not there is a cause-and-effect relationship at work here, or whether it is merely a correlation between two variables which are not necessarily related to each other. However, the correlation is clearly evident and is certainly worthy of additional investigation.

Question 2

How Often Parents Read With Their Children

(By demographic subgroups)

	Almost every day	A couple of times a week	Several times a month or less often
	%	%	%
Total sample	51	25	21
Sex of child			
Male	52	25	19
Female	50	24	21
Child's year in school			
Pre-school	62	29	8
Kindergarten - 2nd grade	75	19	6
3rd grade - 5th grade	47	28	21
6th grade or more	26	23	43
Child's interest in reading			
Very interested	64	17	16
Somewhat interested	41	34	23
Not very/not at all interested	31	30	32
Type of school			
Public	48	23	25
Non-public	54	23	19
Annual household income			
Under $15,000	48	22	27
$15,000 to $34,999	52	26	17
$35,000 and over	51	23	22
Parent's education			
Less than HS graduate	48	23	25
High school graduate	45	28	22
Some college	55	26	15
College graduate or more	59	20	18
Mother's employment status			
Working	50	24	22
Non-working	57	25	15

Table is percentaged horizontally. "Don't know" results omitted.

There are also smaller differences, though not as dramatic, with respect to parents' education level and the mother's working status.

- Parents with a college degree (59%) or some college (55%) are more likely to read with their children every day than parents who did not continue their education beyond high school (45%) or parents who left high school before graduating (48%).

- Parents in households with non-working mothers are somewhat more likely to read with their children every day than those where the mother works (57% to 50%). This, however, may be due as much to the fact that the children in households with working mothers in this survey tend to be somewhat older than the children in households where the mother doesn't work (8.5 years versus 7.7 years) as to the question of whether working mothers can find sufficient time to read to their children every day.

Parents' Reading Habits

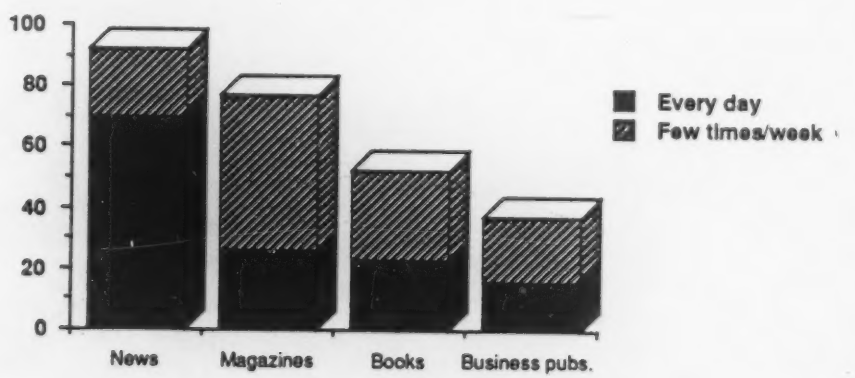
National surveys have consistently shown that most Americans read newspapers and periodicals on a regular basis, and the *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* finds this is true of parents in this survey. In discussing their own reading habits, 7 in 10 parents say they read to keep up with the news almost every day, with an additional 22% saying they read the news a couple of times a week. Magazines are also read frequently, with 26% saying they read magazines almost every day and an additional 51% saying they read them a couple of times a week.

Reading books for pleasure, however, is somewhat less frequent. Almost equal percentages of parents report reading books daily (23%), weekly (29%), monthly (25%), and less often (23%). Interestingly, daily book reading cuts uniformly across all demographic subgroups.

The least frequent form of reading is business publications, with 16% of parents saying they read them almost every day.

Question D-1

Parents' Reading Habits



The *Jell-O® Desserts Family Reading Survey* clearly suggests that frequent book reading by parents is a strong inducement to children to read frequently. A 60% majority of parents who read books almost every day report that their child also reads for pleasure almost every day. When parents' book reading drops to a few times per week, their childrens' frequency of reading drops as well, with only 47% of children reading every day. And in households where parents read books less often than weekly, only 37% of children read on a daily basis.

Questions 2 & 3

Impact Of Parental Reading Habits On Frequency Of Children Reading For Pleasure

	Parents Read Books for Pleasure		
	Every day %	Few times a week %	Less often %
Child reads for pleasure:			
Every day	60	47	37
A few times a week	31	42	45
Less often	8	10	16

The Home Reading Environment

In order to get a broader picture of the home reading environment that children have—at least in the eyes of their parents—one question asked parents whether each of a number of factors relating to their home was true or not true.

Almost all parents indicate that their children have their own books and a place to keep them (98%), that there is a variety of books in their home (95%), and that their children were read aloud to at an early age (95%). An additional 9 in 10 parents state that their children often choose their own books (91%), that their children often see at least one of their parents reading (91%), and that there is a variety of magazines and other reading materials in the household (88%).

Somewhat fewer parents (though still a sizeable 71%) say that they limit the amount of time their children can watch television.

At the bottom of the list, 6 in 10 parents report that their children learned to read before first grade and that their children have a certain amount of time set aside each day for reading at home (60% each).

A high percentage of parents claim all or most of the nine factors are true in their households—a higher percentage, perhaps, than some experts might believe is, in fact, the case. It was beyond the intent of the survey to probe in detail either the quantity or quality of what involved in parents' answers: if 98% say their children have their own books and a place to keep them, no attempt was made to find out how many (two or twenty?) or what types (comic books or children's classics?).

Rather, this study is primarily a survey of attitudes and values. The overwhelming number of "true" responses clearly supports the underlying value and importance, expressed earlier, which parents place on reading. Further, it suggests that most parents feel that they are attempting, or certainly desire, to create a positive home reading environment. And finally, it reveals how

strongly parents affirm many of the generally accepted notions about encouraging children to read.

Question 5

Attributes Of The Home Reading Environment

	True	Not true	Don't know
Your children have their own books and a place to keep them	98%	2	-
There is a variety of books in your home	95%	5	-
Your children were read aloud to at an early age	95%	4	1
Your children often choose the books they read	91%	8	1
Your children often see you or your spouse reading	91%	9	-
There is a variety of magazines/other reading material in your home	88%	12	-
The amount of time your children are allowed to watch TV is limited	71%	28	1
Your children learned to read before first grade	60%	33	7
Your children have a certain amount of time set each day for reading at home	60%	39	1

Where Children Get Books

Children who are old enough to read get their books from a wide variety of sources. Borrowing books from the library clearly dominates, with 74% of parents saying their children obtain books this way. More specifically, 55% say their children get books from the public library; 34% say they get them from the school library.

The public library becomes a more important source for books as children get older. Fully 69% of children in 6th grade or older get books from the public library, compared with 58% of children in grades 3 through 5, 44% in Kindergarten through 2nd grade, and 40% of children who have not yet begun Kindergarten.

A 69% majority say their children's books are bought. Again, this is highly age related, with book buying being highest for younger children (83% for children not yet in Kindergarten) and then decreasing steadily as children get older (to 60% for children in 6th grade or more).

For children who are too young to read, books are typically bought (86%). Far fewer parents of children in this category (26%) get books for their children from libraries.

Question 7

Sources Of Books

	Parents of children who read	Parents who read to children
Libraries (net)	74%	26%
Public library	55	25
School library	34	3
Books are bought (net)	69	86
Parent buys	31	41
Books part of home library	19	17
Bookstore	6	14
Gifts	5	8
Book Club	5	9
Order by mail	4	8
Child buys	3	-
Store (unspecificed)	3	8
Magazines	3	2
School	13	2

Effective Methods Parents Use To Encourage Reading

Parents of children who are able to read volunteer a wide variety of methods that they have used and found effective in encouraging their children to read. By far the most popular are activities which are motivational in nature rather than instructional activities.

The number one method, mentioned by 45% of parents, are activities directly involving reading, such as reading to the child, having the child read to the parents, or letting children see parents read.

An additional 30% of parents say exposing their children to books (e.g., buying them books or taking them to the library) has been effective in helping their children to begin reading, while 1 in 5 (19%) say it is a matter of providing motivation or encouragement for their children to read (including games, Sesame Street, and just general types of encouragement).

Only 14% of parents point specifically to instructional activities—such as the use of flash cards, the teaching of phonics, or other aids to reading—as methods which they have found to be effective in encouraging their children to read.

Interestingly, very few parents (3%) use either reward or punishment as an inducement to read. Only 1% say their child is self-motivated and therefore needs no encouragement to read. And very few parents (6%) say they do nothing.

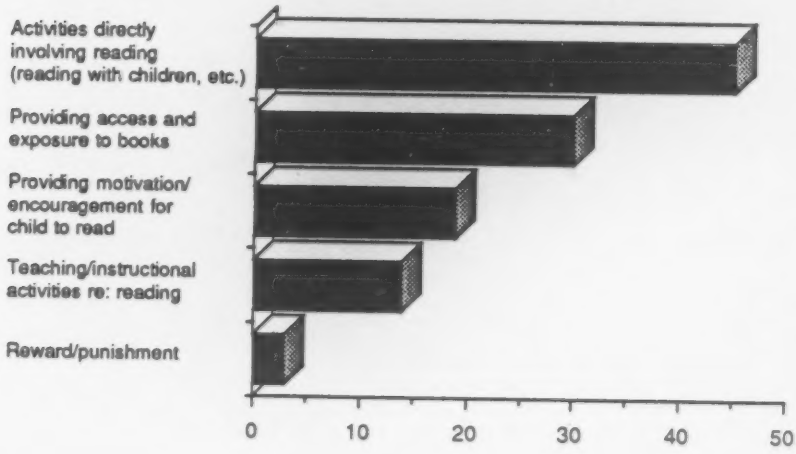
The major demographic difference in this question is between those children who are very interested in reading and those who are less so. While there are no differences in the rank order, they do represent important differences in degree.

- Confirming the earlier findings in the study about the important role that parents play in development of their children's reading habits and skills, parents reading to children or children

reading to parents is highest for children who are very interested in reading (50%), and lower for those with a moderate (42%) or low (37%) level of interest in reading.

Question 12

Methods Parents Have Used And Found Effective In Encouraging Children To Read



Helping Parents Help Their Children Read

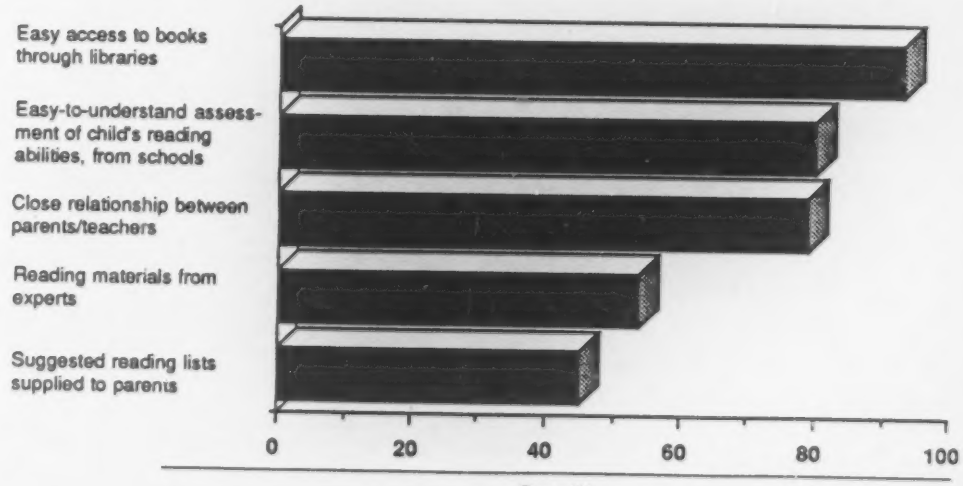
Parents were asked how useful they would find each of five suggested aids for parents in helping their children become good readers. While all five are considered at least "somewhat useful" by virtually all parents, several stand out above the others in terms of their being "very useful."

Easy access for children to books through either public or school libraries tops the list, named by over 9 in 10 as "very useful." Next were schools providing parents with easy-to-understand assessments of a child's reading ability and a close relationship between children's teachers and children's parents, each cited as "very useful" by 8 in 10.

Materials being supplied to parents by schools or other educational experts that would assist parents in encouraging their children to read won the vote of a bare majority (54%). Of least interest, with just under half (45%) saying it would be very useful, are suggested reading lists supplied to parents by schools or other educational experts.

Question 13

Reading Aids Which Parents Say Would Be Very Useful



While these last two types of reading assistance are not seen as being universally useful by parents, they are strongly embraced by parents at the low end of the socio-economic ladder—those with low income and little education.

For example, fully 73% of parents with less than a high school diploma say they would find materials supplied by schools or educational experts to be "very useful," compared with 58% of parents who finished high school, 52% of those with some college, and 43% of those with a college degree or more. This type of program is also seen as "very useful" to a 72% majority of parents with an annual household income of under $15,000 per year and 58% of those with annual incomes of between $15,000 and $35,000, compared with 44% of those $35,000 or more in annual household income.

Similarly, suggested reading lists are of greater interest to those with a lower level of education (53% of parents with less than a high school degree say this would be"very useful," compared with 40% of those with a college degree or more) and a lower income level (58% of those earning less than $15,000 per year say this would be very helpful, versus 39% of those earning $35,000 or more).

A similar pattern—though less pronounced—is found with respect to the other programs as well. Clearly, parents who themselves might not have the skills (in the case of those with little education) or the money (in the case of those with low income families) have as much desire as others to help their children to become better readers.

Appendices

Survey Methodology

Description Of The Sample

A nationwide cross-section of 1000 parents of children between the ages of 3 and 14 were interviewed for this study.

Sampling Method

Interviews were conducted by telephone. The results are representative of the total population of parents with children between the ages of 3 and 14 in homes having telephones.

The sample was drawn at random from among all telephone households in the Continental United States. Households contacted for the survey were selected at random by a procedure known as random digit dialing, which insures that households with unlisted telephone numbers, as well as those with listed numbers, are included in the sample.

A short screening questionnaire was administered to ascertain whether or not each household had children between the ages of 3 and 14. In order to maximize the chances of speaking with the parent who is most involved with the child's reading development without saying up-front that the study would focus on reading, the interview was conducted with the parent who is most involved in overseeing how the children spend their time.

It was also necessary in many of the questions to focus the interview on one child in particular within each household. Therefore, in households with two or more children, a random selection procedure was used to identify which child would be discussed during the interview.

Interviewing

Interviewing on this study was conducted between February 6 and 26, 1988. All interviews were conducted from the central location telephone interviewing facility of The Roper Organization. Interviewing was conducted during evening hours

on weekdays and all day on weekends to ensure that both working as well as non-working segments of the population would be included.

Percentages Not Totaling 100%

Responses were computerized and rounded off to the nearest whole percent. As a result, percentages in certain tables may sometimes total slightly more or less than 100%. Also, in certain tables the results of those who said "don't know" or chose not to answer have been omitted.

Demographic Breakdown Of The Sample

		Men	Women
Number Of Respondents	**1000 (100%)**		
Sex Of Parent (Respondent)			
Male	29		
Female	71		
Parent's Education			
Non-high school graduate	10		
High school graduate	42		
Some college	21		
College graduate or more	27		
Parent's Age			
18 - 29	21		
30 - 39	55		
40 and older	24		
Household Income			
Less than $15,000 per year	15		
$15,000 to $24,999	22		
$25,000 to $34,999	20		
$35,000 and over	36		
Refused	7		
Geographic Area			
Northeast	19		
Midwest	27		
South	37		
West	17		
Race			
White	82		
Black	12		
Other	6		
Parent's Employment Status			
Employed full time	60	84	50
Employed part time	13	5	16
Not employed outside home	27	10	33

	%
Parent's Marital Status	
Married	81
Single	6
Widowed	2
Separated/divorced	12
Number Of Parents Living In Household	
One	22
Two	78
Total Number Of Children In Household	
One	51
Two	36
Three or more	14
Average #	*1.7*
Sex Of Child Asked About	
Male	52
Female	48
Child's Age	
3 - 5 years	27
6 - 8 years	26
9 - 11 years	24
12 - 14 years	23
Average age	*8.3*
Child's Grade In School	
Pre-school or less	23
Kindergarten - 2nd grade	26
3rd - 5th grades	24
6th grade or more	27
Type Of School Child Attends	
Public	64
Non-public	12
Not asked— child not yet in school	23

Questionnaire

The Roper Organization
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

#844-070
February, 1988
I.D. (1-4)

Parental Attitudes Survey
(Screener)

Hello. My name is _____ and I'm calling from The Roper Organization, a national public opinion research firm and we're conducting an important survey among parents that will help in the development of educational tools to improve children's basic skills.

First, may I ask, how many children between the ages of 3 and 14 currently live in this household?

None.....1	(TERMINATE WITH THANKS)	5/
1 or more.....2	(CONTINUE)	

And, are you 18 years of age or older and the parent or guardian of these children?

Yes.....1	(CONTINUE)	6/
No.....2	(ASK TO SPEAK TO A PARENT OR GUARDIAN OVER 18)	

WHEN PARENT IS ON PHONE, RECORD WHETHER RESPONDENT IS:

Male.....1	(GO TO A. MALE)	7/
Female.....2	(GO TO B. FEMALE)	

A. (MALE)

Are you, or is the other parent the one most involved in overseeing how the children spend their time--school work, leisure time, etc.?

Respondent.....1	(GO TO C. PAGE 2)	8/
Other parent.....2	(ASK TO SPEAK TO OTHER PARENT. IF NOT AVAILABLE, SCHEDULE CALL BACK.)	
Both equally (Vol.)..3	(GO TO C. PAGE 2)	

B. (FEMALE)

Are you, or is the other parent the one most involved in overseeing how the children spend their time--school work, leisure time, etc.?

Respondent.....1	(GO TO C. PAGE 2)	9/
Other parent.....2	(ASK TO SPEAK TO OTHER PARENT. IF NOT AVAILABLE, SCHEDULE CALL BACK.)	
Both equally (Vol.)..3	(ASK TO SPEAK TO THE FATHER. IF RESPONDENT ASKS WHY, SAY: "Well, we're trying to get an equal distribution and males are more generally more difficult to reach." IF FATHER IS NOT AVAILABLE, SCHEDULE CALL BACK.)	

C. HOUSEHOLD INFORMATION

First, for statistical purposes and so that we will know which child to talk about for this survey, would you please tell me the name or initials, the sex, and the age of each of the children living in this household?

	Name	Sex (Male -1, Female -2)	Age	Survey Child (Yes -1)
1.		10-	11-12	13-
2.		14-	15-16	17-
3.		18-	19-20	21-
4.		22-	23-24	25-
5.		26-	27-28	29-
6.		30-	31-32	33-
7.		34-	35-36	37-
8.		38-	39-40	41-
9.		42-	43-44	45-
10.		46-	47-48	49-

IF MORE THAN ONE CHILD AGE 3 - 14:
For the purposes of this interview, we will be talking about the child between 3 and 14 who had the most recent birthday. Which of these children would that be? Please tell me the name or initials you used before. (RECORD ABOVE UNDER "SURVEY CHILD")

IF ONLY ONE CHILD AGE 3 - 14:
For the purposes of this interview, we will be talking about (NAME OR INITIALS GIVEN EARLIER FOR THIS AGE). (RECORD ABOVE UNDER "SURVEY CHILD")

CONTINUE ONTO QUESTIONNAIRE.

The Roper Organization
205 East 42nd Street
New York, NY 10017

#844-070
February, 1988

Time start: _____

Parental Attitudes Survey

Q.1 Children have a variety of interests outside of school. I'm going to read you a list of activities that (CHILD'S NAME) might be interested in. For each one, please tell me if it is something that (HE/SHE) is very interested in, somewhat interested in, not very interested in, or not at all interested in. First, (READ ITEM). (READ LIST AND RECORD ONE ANSWER FOR EACH ITEM)

	Very Interested	Somewhat Interested	Not Very Interested	Not at all Interested	(Vol.) Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
sports	48	32	10	9	1	-
music	44	40	11	5	1	-
reading	51	33	10	3	2	-
spending time with friends	73	22	3	1	1	-
television	52	39	8	1	-	-
movies	42	37	14	5	1	-
games/hobbies, etc	59	31	8	2	1	-

Q.2 Some parents have a limited amount of time that they can spend with their children. I'm going to read some activities that parents might spend time doing with their child. For each activity, please tell me whether you or the child's other parent do that almost every day, a couple of times a week, more like several times a month, or less often than that with (NAME OF CHILD). First, (READ ITEM). (READ LIST AND RECORD ONE ANSWER FOR EACH ITEM)

	Almost Every Day	Couple Times a Week	Several Times a Month	Less Often	Doesn't Apply	Don't Know
playing games or sports	21	51	16	11	1	-
watching TV	69	24	3	3	1	-
helping with homework	55	18	4	5	18	-
reading	51	25	10	11	4	-
going out to movies, sporting events, music events, museums, etc	2	17	47	30	3	-

Q.3 Many different things can affect a child's life while growing up. Some of these things may have an impact on the child in later years and some may not. I'm going to name some of those things and would like you to think about how important each of these current factors will be on a child's future. First, (READ ITEM). Would you say that (RE-READ ITEM) will be very important, somewhat important, not that important, or not at all important in a child's life? (READ LIST AND RECORD ONE ANSWER FOR EACH ITEM)

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Not That Important	Not at all Important	Don't Know
the neighborhood the child lives in	65	29	5	1	-
the religious training of the child	72	25	4	1	1
the grades a child receives	66	31	3	-	1
the amount of time parents spend with a child	94	6	-	-	-
how well a child reads	91	9	-	-	-
how much a child reads	72	26	2	-	-
the school a child goes to	69	28	2	1	-
the friends a child has	77	21	2	-	-
the family's income	24	51	21	4	-

Q.4 I'm going to read you a list of some of the subjects that are covered in school, and for each one, I'd like you to tell me how important you think it is in a child's education. First, (READ ITEM), would you say that it is very important, somewhat important, not that important, or not at all important? (READ LIST AND RECORD ONE ANSWER FOR EACH ITEM)

	Very Impt.	Somewhat Impt.	Not that Impt.	Not at all Impt.	Don't Know
arithmetic or math	89	10	-	-	1
reading	97	2	-	-	1
physical education or gym	46	47	7	1	-
history	48	47	4	1	-
science	61	36	3	-	1
social studies or geography	51	45	3	-	1
music or art	33	57	9	1	-
writing	78	21	1	-	-
foreign languages	22	57	17	4	-

Q.5 Let's talk about one of the topics we've just been discussing, reading. I'm going to name some factors that deal with reading. For each one, please tell me whether or not it is true for you and your household. First, (READ ITEM). Would you say that it is true for you and your household or not? (READ LIST AND RECORD ONE ANSWER FOR EACH ITEM.)

	True	Not True	Don't Know
There is a variety of books in your home..	95	5	-
There is a variety of magazines and other reading material in your home..	88	12	-
Your children often see you or your spouse reading.....	91	9	-
Your children were read aloud to at an early age.....	95	4	1
Your children learned to read before first grade.....	60	33	7
Your children have a certain amount of time set aside each day for reading at home.....	60	39	1
The amount of time your children are allowed to watch TV is limited.....	71	28	1
Your children often choose the books they read.....	91	8	1
Your children have their own books and a place to keep them.....	98	2	-

Q.6 How often would you say (NAME OF CHILD) reads for pleasure? Would you say (HE/SHE) reads... (READ LIST)? (INTERVIEWER: IF PARENT INDICATES THAT THE CHILD IS TOO YOUNG TO READ, CHECK BOX BELOW AND ASK: "Well then, thinking about how much the child likes being read to...",)

		Children Who Read	Parents Read to Children
	every day.....	44	56
	a few times a week.....	43	29
	several times a month....	8	4
	a few times a month.....	3	2
	once a month or less.....	2	-
	or Never.....	1	-
DO NOT READ	Doesn't apply.....	-	7
DO NOT READ	Don't know.....	-	1

Q.7 When your child reads, where does (HE/SHE) get the books? (INTERVIEWER: IF PARENT HAS INDICATED THAT THE CHILD IS TOO YOUNG TO READ, CHECK BOX BELOW AND ASK: "Where do you get the books to read to HIM/HER?") (WRITE IN ANSWER AND CODE AFTER INTERVIEW -- IF MORE THAN ONE ANSWER, CODE ALL THAT APPLY)

	Children Who Read	Parents Read to Children
Libraries (net)	74	26
Public	55	25
School	34	3
Books are bought(net)	69	86
School (NFI)	13	2
Books are borrowed (net)	2	1

Q.8 Who or what do you think is or was most important in encouraging (CHILD'S NAME) to begin reading? (WRITE IN AND CODE BELOW AFTER INTERVIEW)

Parents (net)	68
Mother	47
Parents (unspecified)	16
Father	14
School/teachers	15
Child's own motivation	10
Other family member	10

Q.9 Whose responsibility do you feel it is to make sure that a child reads well? Is it primarily the responsibility of...? (READ LIST AND RECORD BELOW)

	the child	2
	the parents	58
	or	
	the schools	9
DO NOT READ	a combination (Vol.)	32
DO NOT READ	Don't know	-

Q.10 Whose responsibility do you feel it is to make sure that a child develops an interest in reading...? (READ LIST AND RECORD BELOW)

	the child	3
	the parents	72
	or	
	the schools	3
DO NOT READ	a combination (Vol.)	22
DO NOT READ	Don't know	-

Q.11 Given (CHILD'S NAME) age, how satisfied are you with the way (HE/SHE) reads? Would you say you are...(READ LIST)?

	very satisfied	57
	somewhat satisfied	24
	somewhat dissatisfied	4
	very dissatisfied	1
DO NOT READ	child doesn't read (Vol.)	13
DO NOT READ	Don't know	-

Q.12 What methods, if any, have you personally used and found effective in encouraging your children to read and help them with reading? (RECORD VERBATIM)

Activities directly involving reading	45
Providing Access/Exposure to books and tapes	30
Providing activities/experiences/games to encourage reading	19
Teaching/Instructing/Assisting with Schoolwork	14
Rewards/Punishment	3

Q.13 I'd like to read you a list of some different things which may help parents in helping their children to become good readers. For each one, I would like you to tell me whether, considering your situation, it is something that you would find very useful, somewhat useful, not very useful, or not at all useful. First, (READ ITEM) (READ LIST)

	Very useful	Somewhat useful	Not very useful	Not at all useful	Don't Know
Suggested reading lists being supplied to parents by schools or other educational experts	45	45	8	2	-
Materials — such as games, activities, books, etc.— being supplied to parents by schools or other educational experts that would help parents encourage their children to read	54	39	4	2	1
A close relationship between children's teachers and children's parents	79	17	2	1	1
Schools providing parents with easy to understand assessments of a child's reading abilities	80	18	1	1	-
Easy access for children to books, through either public or school libraries	93	6	-	-	-

Q.14 There are differing opinions as to how important reading skills are in today's society. Some people say that as we are becoming more video oriented, reading skills are less important than in the past. Others disagree. Would you yourself say that reading skills are more important than in the past, less important, or have about the same importance as in the past?

	more important.....	63
	less important.....	3
	about the same.....	33
DO NOT READ	Don't know.....	-

I have just a few more questions that we use for statistical classification purposes only.

D-1. For each type of reading I name, please tell me if you do that almost every day, a couple of times a week, several times a month, or less often than that? First, (READ ITEM). (READ LIST)

	Almost Every Day	Couple of Times a Week	Several Times a Month	Less Often	Don't Know
reading to keep up with the news.....	70	22	5	5	-
reading magazines or other publications for pleasure.....	26	51	17	6	-
reading books for pleasure.....	23	29	25	23	-
reading business publications...	16	21	22	41	1

D-2a.What year of school is (CHILD'S NAME) currently in?

Day care.....	5	4th Grade.....	8
Nursery/pre-school/ pre-K program.....	13	5th Grade.....	8
Kindergarten.....	9	6th Grade.....	9
1st Grade.....	10	7th Grade.....	8
2nd Grade.....	7	8th Grade.....	7
3rd Grade.....	9	9th Grade or higher.	4
		Not in school	5

D-2b.Does (CHILD'S NAME) attend a public school, a private school, or a church run school?

Public.....	84	Church run.....	10
Private.....	6	Don't know.....	-

D-3. Which of the following categories includes your age? (READ LIST)

	18 - 29.....	21
	30 - 39.....	55
	40 - 44.....	15
	45 - 49.....	5
	50 - 64.....	3
	65 and older.....	1
DO NOT READ	Refused.....	-

D-4. What was the last grade of school you completed, not counting specialized schools like secretarial, art or trade schools?

8th grade or less (1-8).....	2
Some high school (9-11).....	8
High school graduate (12).....	42
Some college (13-15).....	21
College graduate (16).....	17
Post-graduate (17+).....	10
Refused.....	-

D-5. Are you (READ LIST):

	married.....	81
	single.....	6
	widowed.....	2
	separated.....	2
	or divorced.....	10
DO NOT READ	refused.....	-

D-6. Are both of (<u>child's name</u>) parents living in the household at this time?

Yes.....	89
No.....	11

D-7. Is (<u>child's name</u>) (father/mother) regularly employed either <u>full time</u> or <u>part time</u>? (IF YES: Which?)

Full time.....	85
Part time.....	7
Not employed.....	10
Refused.....	1

D-8. Are you regularly employed either <u>full time</u> or <u>part time</u>? (IF YES: Which?)

Full time.....	60
Part time.....	13
Not employed.....	27
Refused.....	-

D-9. For statistical purposes only, we need to know your total household income. I'm going to read off some categories. Would you please stop me when I name the category that best describes the combined annual income of this household?

	under $5,000.....	3
	$5,000 to $9,999.....	4
	$10,000 to $14,999.....	8
	$15,000 to $19,999.....	12
	$20,000 to $24,999.....	10
	$25,000 to $34,999.....	20
	$35,000 to $49,999.....	21
	$50,000 and over.....	15
DO NOT READ	Refused/don't know.....	7

D-10. Are you (READ CATEGORIES):

	white.....	82
	black.....	12
	oriental.....	1
	or	
	some other race.....	4
DO NOT READ	Refused.....	1

D-11. Are you of Hispanic origin or not?

Yes.....	8
No.....	89
Refused.....	2

INTERVIEWER RECORD:

D-12. Sex:

Male..... 29 Female.....71

D-13. Geographic area (CIRCLE FROM SAMPLE):

Northeast...19 Midwest...27 South...37 West...17

D-14. Metro size (CIRCLE FROM SAMPLE):

1 mil. +	250,000-1 mil.	100,000-250,000	less than 100,000
35	30	17	18

Could I please have your name or initials for validation purposes?

Name: _____

Phone #: _____

Interviewer's name: _____

Date: _____ Time end: _____

Total length of interview: _____